KINONIK

STALAG 17 (1953)

Directed by Billy Wilder

Coming Next Wednesday February 12th
STALAG 17 (1953) directed by BILLY WILDER
starring William Holden, Don Taylor, and Otto Preminger



While the Battle of the Bulge rages on, two American POWs make their meticulously planned escape from the German camp Stalag 17... only to be swiftly gunned down. Their distraught barracks-mates smell a rat. Tensions mount as they desperately try to flush out the traitor -- all the while having a good laugh. This is a comedy, after all!

Lauded writer and director Billy Wilder's cynical, farcical Stalag 17, based on the play of the same name by two former POWs, embraces the necessity of both humor and skepticism for survival. Throughout the course of its two-hour runtime, the motley crew of prisoners joke, bet, and barter their way through their detention, determined to deny the Nazi commandment victory in the battle of morale. And yet, Wilder does not tolerate romantic ideals of heroism – this is not a war film where men go boldly to brave deaths. Camp life, and any chance for escape, demands a watchful eye and the willingness to question one's every assumption – how the world works, what kind of man would sell out his own, and which racing mouse you should bet your cigarettes on.

To truly sell the stakes the cast — featuring William Holden (winning the Oscar for Best Actor in a Leading Role), Don Taylor, Otto Preminger, ten former prisoners of war, and one of the original playwrights, – were left as in the dark as the audience. Despite the added costs, Wilder shot the film chronologically, revealing the informant only three days before shooting the climactic scene. This dedication to realized characters is exemplified in this tight, tense, constantly hilarious film where the action is driven not by grand external forces but the assumptions, needs, and fear of the men trapped within it.

Stalag 17 is a muddy romp examining how selfish - or selfless - humans can be in extreme circumstances. Sit down, side with the American clowns, and hope, like they do, that the Nazis "laugh themselves to death".